

### GIS NOT READY FOR CHEMICAL WAR

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U.S. soldiers preparing for an attack on Iraq lack enough state-of-the-art protective gear against chemical and biological attacks, it was reported yesterday.

Rep. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.), chairman of the Government Reform Committee's National Security Subcommittee, said Pentagon officials recently uncovered a problem with gas masks that have the wrong gaskets and will require inspections to ensure they are working properly.

"I visited the troops in Europe, who I believe will be first responders in Iraq, and they did not have the best equipment we have, and that is a concern to me," Shays told The Washington Post. "We don't know where some of our best suits are - they are God-knows-where. And in some cases, we've mixed bad inventory with good."

This comes a month after the General Accounting Office told Shays' subcommittee the Pentagon could not locate 250,000 defective suits made by a New York-based company called Isratex, whose officers have been convicted of intentionally providing the military with defective garments.

In a letter sent Wednesday to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), a member of Shays' subcommittee, cited "extremely troubling" testimony on chemical and biological preparedness, particularly in regard to the 250,000 missing suits.

But present and former military officers say the reports of problems are overblown.

"Every fighter wing, every Navy ship at sea, every Army battalion is fully equipped to fight in a chemical environment," said retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffery, a Gulf War commander who still consults with the Pentagon.

Meanwhile, Iraq yesterday accused the U.S. of trying to undermine the U.N. weapons probe - and said the Americans are meddling in the investigation to create an excuse for launching a war.

The U.S. "will continue to make threats and poke its nose into the work of the inspectors and will fabricate any event or issue to confuse their work or obstruct it, especially when the inspectors and the world realize that Iraq does not have weapons of mass destruction," said Al-Thawra, a paper controlled by Iraq's ruling Baath party.

Iraq has pledged total cooperation with the inspectors, who returned to the country this week to

hunt for Saddam's terror weapons under a strict U.N. resolution that gives the Butcher of Baghdad one last chance to disarm.

The inspection team will resume its field missions today after spending yesterday, the Muslim Sabbath, doing office work. With Post Wire Services